



**US Army Corps
of Engineers®**

SPECIAL PUBLIC NOTICE

PUBLIC SCOPING MEETING

San Jacinto and Upper Santa Margarita River Watersheds
Special Area Management Plan (SAMP)

LOS ANGELES DISTRICT

Public Notice/Application No.: 200001709-FT
Comment Period: 23 December 2002 through 7 February 2003
Project Manager: Fari Tabatabai (213) 452-3291 fari.tabatabai@usace.army.mil

ACTIVITY: Public Scoping meeting for Draft Environmental Impact Statement associated with the preparation of a Special Area Management Plan (SAMP) and associated 404 Permit Actions for the San Jacinto River and Upper Santa Margarita River watersheds, Western Riverside County, CA. The document will be prepared as a joint federal EIS and state Environmental Impact Report (i.e., a joint EIS/EIR). The state lead agency is the California Department of Fish and Game (CDFG).

AGENCY: Department of Defense, Department of the Army, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Los Angeles District, Regulatory Branch

ACTION: Notification of a Public Scoping meeting to prepare a Draft EIS/EIR

Interested parties are hereby notified that a Public Scoping meeting is being held regarding the Draft EIS/EIR for the San Jacinto River and Upper Santa Margarita River watersheds SAMP. Interested parties are invited to provide their views on the issues of concern that should be considered in the Draft EIS/EIR.

Comments should be mailed to:

U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Los Angeles District
Regulatory Branch
ATTN: CESPL-CO-R-FT
P.O. Box 532711
Los Angeles, California 90053-2325

Alternatively, comments can be sent electronically to: Fari.Tabatabai@usace.army.mil.

SUMMARY: The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (Corps of Engineers) will be preparing a DEIS for a Special Area Management Plan (SAMP) and associated Department of the Army (DA) permits under Section 404 of the Clean Water Act. The SAMP is being developed to address potential conflicts between anticipated development, infrastructure, and maintenance projects and existing aquatic resources in the watersheds of the San Jacinto River and upper Santa Margarita River (SAMP study area). The DEIS will assess the impacts of various land development and aquatic resource protection alternatives as set forth below and further identified during the preparation of the SAMP. The DEIS will be a joint Environmental Impact Statement/Environmental Impact Report (EIS/EIR) prepared with the California Department of Fish and Game, which will develop a Master Streambed Alteration Agreement (MSAA) under Section 1600 of the California Fish and Game Code.

PUBLIC SCOPING: The Corps of Engineers invites the participation of affected state, federal, and local agencies and other interested persons and organizations in identifying issues of concern that should be addressed in the EIS pursuant to the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) and Section 404 of the Clean Water Act. Written comments on the scope of the EIS must be submitted to the address below by February 23, 2003. A public scoping meeting to receive input on the scope of the EIS will be conducted on January 23, 2003 at 6:30 PM – 9:00 PM at the Simpson Center located at 305 E. Devonshire Avenue, Hemet, CA 92543. This will be a scoping meeting to address both the EIS for the SAMP and the EIR for the Master Streambed Alteration Agreement. The public scoping will be conducted in an open-house format.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Dr. Fari Tabatabai, Regulatory Branch, CESPL-CO-R, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Los Angeles District, P.O. Box 532711, Los Angeles, California 90053-2325.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION:

1.0 Proposed Action

The Corps of Engineers utilizes Special Area Management Plans (SAMPs) to assist in long-term planning for regulatory actions under Section 404 of the Clean Water Act that involve large areas, complex projects, and sensitive aquatic resources. The SAMP study area consists of two watersheds located in western Riverside County: the San Jacinto River watershed and the upper Santa Margarita River watershed (Figure 1). The total SAMP study area consists of 339,247 hectares (1,309 square miles or 838,279 acres) within Western Riverside County. Any areas of the watersheds within San Diego County are not included within the SAMP study area.

The San Jacinto River watershed encompasses 198,229 hectares (765 square miles or 489,823 acres) in western Riverside County, California. The watershed originates in the San Jacinto Mountains, drains

westerly into Canyon Lake and terminates in Lake Elsinore. Urban areas within this watershed include Gilman Hot Springs, Hemet, Lake Elsinore, Menifee, Moreno Valley, Perris, San Jacinto, Sun City, and Winchester. Large parts of the SAMP study area are currently developed for agriculture, residential and commercial uses. Aquatic resources in the remaining undeveloped portions of the SAMP study area consist of intermittent and ephemeral drainages, riparian wetlands, freshwater seeps, and alkali marsh. The major tributaries of the San Jacinto River include Bautista Creek, Cottonwood Creek, Perris Valley Channel, Poppet Creek, Potrero Creek, and Salt Creek.

The upper Santa Margarita River watershed encompasses 141,018 hectares (544 square miles or 348,456 acres) in western Riverside County, California. The watershed drains to the southwest into the Santa Margarita River. Urban areas within this watershed include Aguanga, Lake Riverside, Murrieta, Murrieta Hot Springs, Rancho California, Temecula, and Wildomar. Large parts of the SAMP study area are currently developed for agriculture, residential and commercial uses. Aquatic resources in the remaining undeveloped portions of the SAMP study area consist of intermittent and ephemeral drainages, riparian wetlands, freshwater seeps, and alkali marshes. The major tributaries of the Santa Margarita River include Empire Creek, Murrieta Creek (includes minor tributaries Cole Canyon Creek, Miller Canyon Creek, Slaughter House Canyon Creek, and Long Canyon Creek), Santa Gertrudis Creek, Temecula Creek (includes upstream Arroyo Seco Creek, Cahuilla Creek, and Wilson Creek), Pechanga Creek, Tualota Creek, and Warm Springs Creek.

The SAMP will describe an approach and a set of actions to preserve, enhance, and restore aquatic resources, while allowing reasonable economic development and construction and maintenance of public infrastructure facilities within the study area. Key objectives of the SAMP for these two watersheds in western Riverside County are to: (1) evaluate the extent and condition of existing aquatic resources; (2) develop a comprehensive reserve program for the protection, restoration and management of aquatic resources; and (3) identify and evaluate alternative land development scenarios in the context of the aquatic resource reserve program. Based on the SAMP, the Corps of Engineers will identify potential areas and/or activities suitable for authorization using programmatic permitting procedures under Section 404 of the Clean Water Act. Activities that may be authorized using such programmatic permitting procedures include, but are not limited to, the construction of public infrastructure such as roads, flood control projects and utilities, maintenance of public facilities, residential, commercial, industrial, and recreational development.

The Corps of Engineers will develop the SAMP in close coordination with other agencies, including the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, the California Department of Fish and Game, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, and the California Regional Water Quality Control Boards, as necessary. The Corps of Engineers encourages active participation by County and local governments, concerned landowners and the general public. The California Department of Fish and Game will cooperate in the SAMP process by formulating a Master Streambed Alteration Agreement (MSAA) under Sections 1601 and 1603 of the California Fish and Game Code for activities in the SAMP study area that affect lakes, rivers, streams and associated riparian habitats subject to the Department's jurisdiction.

The environmental analysis and the SAMP will be presented in a joint federal and state document. The California Department of Fish and Game will prepare a Program Environmental Impact Report (EIR) in accordance with the California Environmental Quality Act for the actions described in the SAMP. A separate Notice of Preparation (NOP) will be prepared and published by the Department. The Corps of

Engineers and the Department of Fish and Game will work cooperatively to prepare a joint EIS/EIR document, and to coordinate the public noticing and hearing processes under federal and state laws.

2.0 Alternatives

Alternatives that may be considered include the following two categories:

- I. No-SAMP alternatives (also called No-Action alternatives): (a) No SAMP would be prepared, all future development would be reviewed under the current project-by-project review; (b) No construction requiring a DA permit would occur.
- II. SAMP alternatives: Alternatives that may be considered under this category include those based on the following goals: (a) maximize opportunities to protect, restore, and manage aquatic resources while allowing minimal impacts to aquatic resources; (b) minimize new impacts to aquatic resources in areas containing high hydrologic, water quality, and habitat integrity, or in low integrity areas that serve as important corridors or regionally rare aquatic resources; and (c) limit new impacts in aquatic resources that provide habitat for federal and state listed aquatic species. Programmatic DA Permit(s) would be issued for specifically identified activities and permitting criteria would be established for other future activities pursuant to the requirements of Section 404 of the Clean Water Act. SAMP alternatives would be developed in consideration of the on-going MSHCP that seek to maximize the opportunities to protect, restore and manage aquatic resources. SAMP alternatives also would address alternative methods and institutional arrangements for aquatic resource reserve management.

3.0 Key Environmental Issues

The EIS will address impacts associated with future land and infrastructure development in the watersheds and actions to protect aquatic resources, as identified in the SAMP. This assessment will include an evaluation of direct, indirect, and cumulative effects of the alternatives. The impact assessment will include both quantitative and qualitative methods, focusing on comparing impacts amongst the alternatives, and the determination of impact significance. Associated adverse and beneficial impacts of each alternative will be determined.

The key environmental impacts to be addressed in the EIS are listed below:

Aquatic Resources – potential effects of proposed land use changes and infrastructure on the functional integrity and extent of aquatic resources due to altered biological, hydrological, and water quality conditions in the study area. Indirect impacts of land development and human activities in close proximity to aquatic resources will also be addressed. Cumulative impacts to aquatic resource functions including biological, hydrological, and water quality functions will be assessed at a watershed scale.

Surface water quality - potential effects of proposed development activities and land use changes in the watershed on the quality of surface water. The SAMP will address potential impacts to surface water quality based upon supplemental hydrology studies developed by the Corps. Impacts to groundwater resources will be addressed on a programmatic basis.

Threatened and endangered species – potential adverse effects on listed species that are dependent upon aquatic habitats. The Corps will identify the direct and indirect effects of the proposed alternatives on listed species. The Corps will consult with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service under Section 7 of the federal Endangered Species Act concerning potential effects on listed species and designated critical habitat within the SAMP study area.

Cultural resources – potential effects on archeological, ethnographic, paleontologic, and historic resources. A records search will be conducted to identify cultural resources within a one-half mile buffer around drainages proposed for potential impacts. The Corps will comply with the consultation requirements under Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act.

4.0 Schedule

A Draft EIS is expected to be issued for public review in fall of 2003.

For additional information please call any of the following members of my staff: Dr. Fari Tabatabai, SAMP Program Coordinator, at (213) 452-3291. This public notice is issued by the Chief, Regulatory Branch.

Additional information on this action is available at:

<http://www.spl.usace.army.mil/regulatory/samps.htm>

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